

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN SELECTED HOSPITALS IN AWKA METROPOLIS, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The competitive environments in which 21st century employees work has made it imperative that a flexible working arrangement that creates a balance between work and lifestyle be created. Such will allow employees focus on their multiple roles. This study examined the nature of relationship between the flexible working hours and employee performance in selected hospitals in Awka Metropolis. Survey research design was adopted and the research hypotheses were tested with the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The results revealed that there was a positive relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance. However, an unanticipated flexible working system (FWS) was found in the hospitals, where FWS is seen as management centered and not employee centered. Therefore, the study recommended that organization leaders in Nigeria should perceive the implementation of the flexible working arrangement from a broader perspective as employee centered and avail the employees the opportunity to make decision on the flexible working arrangement available to them towards enhancing the effectiveness of the working system.

KEYWORDS: Flexible Working Hours, Employee Performance, Hospitals, Awka, Anambra

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INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the prevalence of flexible work practices (FWPs), which are practices that afford employees control over when, where, or how much they work (Kelly & Moen, 2007). More recently, work and the nature of the work environment; personal reasons (such as home and family, personal career opportunities and professional development); and economic reasons such as level of remuneration particularly in acute care hospital settings, is complicated by the very nature of patient care being ongoing and required around-the-clock. This aspect of care generates the need for flexible working and adds scheduling to the mix of nurse and midwife-specific employment and retention issues and stressors (Drouin & Potter, 2005). According to Venzon (2014), some nurses work just 36 hours a week. But those hours are sometimes compressed into three 12-hour shifts, sometimes on consecutive days. A 40-hour workweek might consist of four 10-hour shifts. Some nurses enjoy having three or four days off a week and believe the longer shifts lead to more consistent patient care with fewer errors. However, others complained that the extended hours add stress to an already demanding job and actually increase the risk for errors. This is because it interferes with a nurse's ability to provide a high quality of patient care. Heavy workloads can also lead to unsafe work environments and errors or near-misses in patient care (Berry & Curry, 2012; Stanton, 2004).

Achieving work life balance and spending quality time with families is the target of every individual

worker, especially among these health workers. More broadly, Chang, Hancock, Johnson, Daly, and Jackson (2005) proposed several strategies to support health workers with their role stress and high workloads. These include: use of stress education and management strategies, team building strategies, balancing priorities, enhancing social and peer support, flexibility in work hours, protocols to deal with violence and retention. Having flexibility in work hours may improve a health worker's ability to cope with the demands of family roles and participate in a 7 day per week/24 hour coverage roster (Chang, et al., 2005). Flexible scheduling is an important element of flexible work hours and in achieving work life balance (Nelson & Tarpey, 2011). Drouin and Potter (2005) describe flexible scheduling as "any system that allows health workers to have control over the hours they work" and they propose this as a strategy that is likely to minimize job stress and benefit patients, health workers and the hospital. Some mechanisms that could help achieve this also include: rotation through clinical areas where the workload is known to be lighter; offer extended breaks to cope with physical demands; offer financial incentives to compensate for increased responsibility; permit flexible self-rostering in order to achieve a balance between work and family commitments; and provide job sharing as an option, giving staff the autonomy to decide on how they split the position (O'Brien-Pallas, Duffield, & Alksnis, 2004).

Accordingly, Dreike, Elizabeth, and Louis (2004), opine that the term flexible working has been used in a broad sense to cover a range of working patterns. They describe Flexible working as the place we work – such as home working – or the kind of contract we are on – such as a temporary contract. Common kinds of flexible working include part-time working, flextime, job sharing, shift-working, various forms of remote working, and compressed working time (Dreike, et al 2004). The central feature of these work arrangements is that it is the employee, not the employer, who chooses the working arrangement, so-called flexibility for employees (Alis, Karsten, & Leopold, 2006). From the employee perspective, flexibility means to have options to choose, when, for how long and for which employer the employee wants to work.

Many organizations have begun to offer flexible work arrangements to help employees balance work and family demands (Galinsky, Bond, & Sakai, 2008). The present study focused on three types of flexible work arrangements that pertain to time flexibility; flextime schedules (i.e., employees can select work hours given certain restrictions by the organization), shift work (ie a pattern of work in which one employee replaces another on the same job within a 24-hour period, Forth and Bryson, 2011) and compressed workweek schedules (i.e., employees often work more hours per day but fewer days per week) with particular reference to three selected hospitals in Awka; Regina Celi Hospital, Faith Hospital and Madonna Hospital Awka.

Statement of the Problem

Flexibility in work schedules and how work is done have grown in importance because it is believed that by allowing employees more control over their work lives, will make them to better balance their work and family responsibilities. Unfortunately, many nurses and midwives reported that overwhelming workload, unclear career progression, inflexible working hours and low salary contribute to stress, dissatisfaction, burnout and injury in the workplace (Howard, et al, 2014). Thus, heavy workloads can result to unsafe work environments and errors or near-misses in patient care as they attempt to balance career and family priorities. Consequently, it may affect their job performance in terms of providing a high quality of patient care. Particularly for more experienced, older nurses, high workload can also result in increased musculoskeletal problems and may resign from the Hospital

Work flexibility is particularly vital in the wake of organizational workload pressures that have increased due to organizational restructurings and right-sizing (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). Thus, it is crucial that employers wishing to retain employees, reduce absenteeism, and increase productivity, employee commitment and loyalty should monitor the workloads placed on employees. As it has been observed by Mathis and Jackson, (2004) that if these demands become too great, then employees are more likely to display absenteeism and tardiness, low commitment and productivity and eventually change jobs.

Objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the influence of flexible working hours on employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis. Specifically, the study explored the nature of relationship between the flexible working hours and performance of employee in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis.

Research Question

What is the nature of relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis?

Hypothesis

Based on the research question, the following hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

H₀: There is no nature of relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis.

H₁: There is nature of relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance.

Scope of the Study

The study centered on flexible working hours and employee performance. It specifically focused on three types of time flexibility (i.e., flextime, shift work, and compressed workweek). It examines the relationship between the availability of flexible working hours (i.e., flextime, shift work, and compressed workweek) and performance of health workers of selected hospitals in Awka: Regina Caeli Hospital, Faith Hospital and Madonna Hospital Awka.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Over the years, a number of studies had examined the various forms of flexible working practices and thus have contributed to our understanding of the outcomes (Tietze & Musson, 2003). This study therefore focused on the three types of flexible work arrangements that pertain to time flexibility: flextime, shift work, and compressed workweek.

Flextime: Is a system whereby employees choose their starting and quitting times from a range of available hours, and are required to work during core times and an agreed number of hours during a settlement or accounting period (typically four weeks) (Whittard, 2005). Outside the core times, at the beginning or end of each day, are flexible bands when employees may choose whether to be at work. Some schemes allow employees to take excess hours as additional leave, known as flexi-leave. Formerly regarded as a rare and cutting-edge workplace arrangement, flextime is now commonly practiced in a wide variety of industries. The advantages of Flextime for the individual include a better work-life balance, fewer commutes, less fatigue, more days off, lower sickness rates (Whittard, 2005). Flextime can give

employees greater freedom to organize their working lives to suit personal needs. The benefits for the company include; better motivated and less fatigued workers, more efficient operation, fewer errors; people working overtime hours without paying overtime rates, fewer facilities and lower sickness rates (Dreike, et al, 2004). Flextime can also help provide staff cover outside normal working hours and reduce the need for overtime and also improve the provision of equal opportunities to staff unable to work standard hours.

Shift-work: Is a pattern of work in which one employee replaces another on the same job within a 24-hour period (Mathis & Jackson, 2004). Shift workers normally work in crews, but in some shift systems, each crew will regularly change its hours of work to rotate morning, afternoon, and night shifts using an eight hour-standard, the 24-hour day can be divided into three “shifts” (Alis, et al, 2006). Shift work is widespread in industries which must run on a 24-hour cycle, such as newspaper production, utilities, hospital and emergency services. Continuous shift systems provide cover for 24 hours, seven days a week. Non-continuous shift systems provide cover for less than the total hours available in a week (Acas, 2013). Although many employers provide some form of additional pay or reward for evening or night shifts, Shift work allows employers to keep up with rapid changes in work environment. It can maximize the use of a plant, reduce production costs and increase output. (Acas, 2013). On the debit side, shift working increases wage and labour costs and can disrupt employees’ social and domestic lives. It can also upset employees’ body rhythms and cause them to lose sleep.

Compressed Work Week: under this arrangement, the standard work week is compressed into fewer than five days (Dreike et al 2004). Compressed working weeks involve the relocation of time worked into fewer and longer blocks during the week, which does not necessarily involve a reduction in total hours worked or any extension in individual choice over which hours are worked. Through starting early and/or finishing late, employees can build up additional hours which they take as a day or half-day away from work. Compressed working weeks can help with recruitment and reduce overtime, employee turnover and absenteeism (Acas, 2013). However, it may be difficult to schedule work and to provide sufficient cover within the compressed working period. In addition, where employees are highly interdependent, time off must be on a strict rota basis. For employees, compressed working weeks can provide a longer weekend and increased leisure opportunities (Acas, 2013). The most common incarnation of the compressed work week is one of four 10-hour days. Other options include three 12-hour days or arrangements in which employees work 9- or 10-hour days over two weeks and are compensated with an extra day or more time off during that time (Whittard, 2005).

Flexible Working Hours and Employee Performance

Employees who work flexibly often have a greater sense of responsibility, ownership and control of their working life (Acas, 2013). Extant studies have identified a range of outcomes of flexible working for employees. First, where employees are able to exercise choice over their working patterns, there is evidence to show a positive impact on job satisfaction (Hyman & Summers, 2004). In addition, some supporters of flexible work arrangements argue that such programs can actually have a positive impact on the productivity of employees (Forth & Bryson, 2011). They contend that employees who are better able to attend to family needs through flex-time are more likely to be contented and productive.

There is also evidence of benefits of flexible working for any given organization, which includes increased productivity (Eaton, 2003; Konrad & Mangal, 2000); financial performance and improved quality (Dex, Smith & Winter, 2001); the ability to attract and retain valued employees (Branine, 2003; Rau and Hyland, 2002); reduced absenteeism, greater employee loyalty and commitment (Grover and Crooker, 1995; Roehling & Moen 2001). Similarly, employees with flexible schedules can adapt their hours to meet business needs and work when they are most productive (Gajendran

& Harrison, 2007). This research supposes that flexible work has economic benefits for achieving the organization's goals. Hence, the transition to flexible working hours has been proclaimed as an appropriate means of satisfying work demands and family needs towards improving employee performance. Thus, this study expands the conceptual understanding of flexible working and offers practical implications for organizations seeking to adopt work–family balance issues, aimed to improve employee performance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on attributions theory by Fritz Heider (1958). Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior (McNall, Masuda & Nicklin, 2010). Attribution theory suggests that FWPs may have divergent consequences, depending on the extent to which managers form organization-serving and self-serving attributions for employees' FWP use (Leslie, Tae-Youn & Mehng, 2012). The study seeks new insight into the relationship between flexible work practice (FWP) and employee performance by accounting for managers' attributions for why employees use FWPs. To better understand the relation between flexible work arrangements and employee performance, this study focused on organization-serving FWP attribution, work productivity, and self-serving FWP attribution, personal life accommodation. Leslie, et al (2012), define **productivity attributions** as perceptions that an employee uses FWPs to increase work performance and efficiency by structuring work around business needs.

They view **personal life attributions** as employee use of FWPs to accommodate non work activities. A few studies have shown that FWPs are means to different ends, including increased work productivity and personal life accommodation (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001, Leslie, Jones & Davis, 1965 in Leslie, et al, 2012). They propose that managers interpret employees' use of FWPs as a sign of high or low organizational commitment, depending on whether managers make productivity or personal life attributions, respectively, for employees' FWP use.

Empirical Review

Clare & Deirdre, (2010) explored an unanticipated consequence of adopting flexible working practices, using professional workers but presented evidence that flexible workers record higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment than their nonflexible counterparts. They also report evidence of work intensification being experienced by both those who work reduced hours and those who work remotely. Using social exchange theory they propose that employees respond to the ability to work flexibly by exerting additional effort, in order to return benefits to their employer.

McNall, et al (2010) examined the relation between the availability of 2 popular types of flexible work arrangements (i.e., flextime and compressed workweek), work-to-family enrichment and, in turn, the relation between work-to-family enrichment and (a) job satisfaction and (b) turnover intentions. In a sample of 220 employed working adults, hierarchical regression analyses showed that work-to-family enrichment mediated between flexible work arrangements and both job satisfaction and turnover intentions, even after controlling for gender, age, marital status, education, number of children, and hours worked.

Nadeem, Dobson, & Hendry, (2005) investigated the discrepancy between the provision of formal policy and the use of flexible working practice. Factor analysis and logistic regression were used to analyze the data, but found that the demographic and work-related variables such as gender, childcare responsibilities, educational level and occupational

group are associated with use of flexible working policies.

Leslie, et al (2012) examined flexible work practices (FWPs) and employees' career success. They integrated theory, signaling and attributions and proposed that managers' perceptions of employee commitment, in turn, shaped employees' career success. They found that FWPs can facilitate career success when their use is attributed to a desire to increase productivity, but they can also constrain career success when their use is attributed to a desire for personal life accommodation, at least in some settings.

Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) assessed the up-take of policies in a single financial services organization found that the social context was associated with the use of flexible working policies and that this effect was significant after controlling for various individual demographic factors.

Research findings revealed that flexible work arrangements were associated with a variety of important organizational attitudes and outcomes. For example, a meta-analysis of 31 studies by Baltes, et al 1999 in Mcnall, et al (2010) found that flexible and compressed workweek schedules were related to productivity, job satisfaction, absenteeism, and satisfaction with work schedules. Research has also shown that helping employees with work-life balance and improving their work performance was the impetus for the creation of flexible work arrangements (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2002). More recent research on flexible scheduling emphasizes the double edged relationship of work-life-balance issues (Grawitch, & Barber, 2010; Pedersen, & Lewis, 2012). While some studies reported negative relations of flexible scheduling with work family conflict and positive with health related outcomes or job satisfaction (Halpern, 2005; Hayman, 2009), the results of other studies support the positive relationship (Bamberg, Dettmers, Funck, Krähe, & Vahle-Hinz, 2012; Costa, Åkerstedt, Nachreiner, Baltieri, Carvalhais, Folkard, Frings Dresen, Gadbois, Gartner, Grzech Sukalo, Härmä, Kandolin, Sartori, & Silvério, 2004). But, it appears that less is known about flexible work arrangements and employee performance in Nigeria, particularly among health workers. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed the descriptive survey design to determine the nature of relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka.

Population of the Study

The target population of the study comprised the employees of three hospitals - Regina Celi Hospital, Faith Hospital and Madonna Hospital Awka, randomly selected from twenty- two (22) registered private hospitals in Awka with staff strengths of 20, 15, and 12 respectively, giving a total population size of Forty-Seven (47). The entire population was used.

Method of Data Collection

Data for the research were collected from primary source. Copies of structured questionnaire were administered to respondents on a five point likert scale questions. Responses were analyzed using SPSS version 22.

Validity of the Instrument

The study adopted face and content validity to measure scope, adequacy and alignment of variables of study. Also, while administering the questionnaire, the corrections given by the health administrators in the process of capturing questions that would measure the variables were effected.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability test of the questionnaire was done using Cronbach Alpha at 5% level of significance. The study employed internal consistency reliability estimator which measures the consistency of result across items.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.624	10

Source: Field Survey 2015

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

Table 2: Schedule of Questionnaire Administered and Returned

Number of Questionnaire Administered	Number of Questionnaire Returned
47	33

Source: Field Survey 2015

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis One

H₀: There is no nature of relationship between the flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis.

H₁: There is nature of relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance in selected Hospitals in Awka Metropolis.

Table 3: Correlation Result of Hypothesis

		Flexible Working Hour	Employee Performance
Flexible working Hours	Pearson Correlation	1	.411*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.018
	N	33	33
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	.411*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018	
	N	33	33

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Version 20

Decision Rule

Reject the null and accept the alternative if p-value < .05; if otherwise, accept the null.

RESULTS

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between flexible working

hours and employee performance. Since p-value is less than .05, we reject the null and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a nature of relationship (positive) between the flexible working hours and employee performance.

Findings/Management Implications

The result for the test of the hypothesis using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient technique revealed that there is a positive relationship between flexible working hours (i.e., flextime, shift work, and compressed workweek) and employee performance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not accepted at 5% critical level. In other words, the result showed that flexible work hours had a positive effect on employee performance. The implication of this finding is that the use of flexible working hours enhances employees' management of their workloads and family priorities without interference of the Hospital Management. The result is consistent with the previous research findings by Mcnall, et al (2010) on flexible work arrangements and work-to-family enrichment, who found that flextime and compressed workweek help employees to experience greater enrichment from work to home, which, in turn, is associated with higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions. This also supports the view of Lee, et al, (2002) that helping employees with work-life balance and improving their work performance was the impetus for the creation of flexible work arrangements. The revelation of seeing flexible working hours as Management centered may create negative perceptions of employees and their attitude to hospital responsibilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Sequel to the data analyzes and hypothesis testing, it is concluded that there is a positive relationship between flexible working hours and employee performance of selected hospitals in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

- Organizations (Hospitals) should focus more attention on flexible working arrangement and its application should be centered on employee.
- Health Institutions in Nigeria should perceive the implementation of the flexible working arrangement from a broader perspective as employee centered and not management centered as it was found in the hospitals.
- Stimulating culture change on flexible working across the labour market will require more than just regulatory change. Organizations are therefore advised to work with government, business leaders and employers to promote the business case for flexible working.

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